9: Evans K-5 (ca. 1940) 1942
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the 17th century, the natives withdrew themselves to the mountains, where they lived a life that some historians have mistaken for aboriginal nomadism. 221

The booleying tradition, finally, throws light on many of the customs connected with cattle and sheep, and helps to explain the absence of the dairy in permanent dwellings which formerly had to serve as winter houses only, most of the dairy work being done in summer. It also helps us to attribute to custom rather than solely to laziness and neglect the Irish farmer's traditional indifference to the fate of his crops during the summer months. "Spring and harvest time," we quote a typical 19th century observer, "are the only periods at which the peasants exert themselves, and then they work very hard; for the rest of the year they are idle."

Fig. 18. Co. Antrim.

The old customs of tending ("herding") the cattle and tethering or spancelling them also derive from the rundale phase with its lack of field-divisions and fences. "Cattle, sheep, pigs and goats," wrote Arthur Young, "are all in bondage, their forelegs tied together with straw .... cocks, hens, turkeys and geese all have their legs in thraldom." Various devices for limiting the freedom of farm animals are still widely used: even the hen with her chickens around her will be seen tethered by the leg to a stone or iron weight. Where animals still run in common under the system of "sums" it is necessary to give them distinguishing marks. Apart from the well-known methods of branding or colouring the sheep's wool it is the custom in parts of Ireland, as in Wales, to ear-mark sheep by cutting or notching the ear with proprietary shapes. In Clare Island the geese are "tokened" by having holes punched in their webbed feet. Incidentally it is worth noticing that, so far as I am aware, the iron-tipped shepherd's crook is unknown in Ireland, a bent ash stick taking its place. "Gatherings" and co-operation are of course a feature of sheep-shearing and dipping. Sheep-pens of dry stone construction are often associated with ancient settlements among the hills: they are of various shapes and would repay study.

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Fig. 23. Scollop thatch

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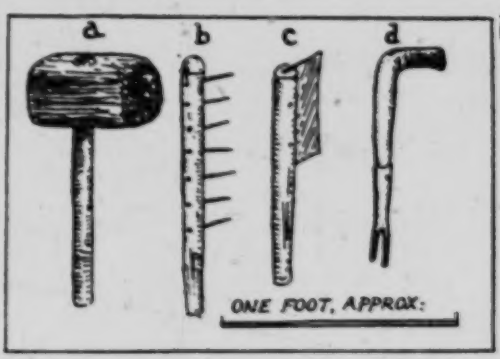

Fig. 24. Tools of a scollop-thatcher.

[p. 65]

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known to be of mediæval descent. The method of manufacture is shown in Fig. 50, and the tying down of a hay pike in Fig. 51. Sugán was sometimes employed instead of wattle

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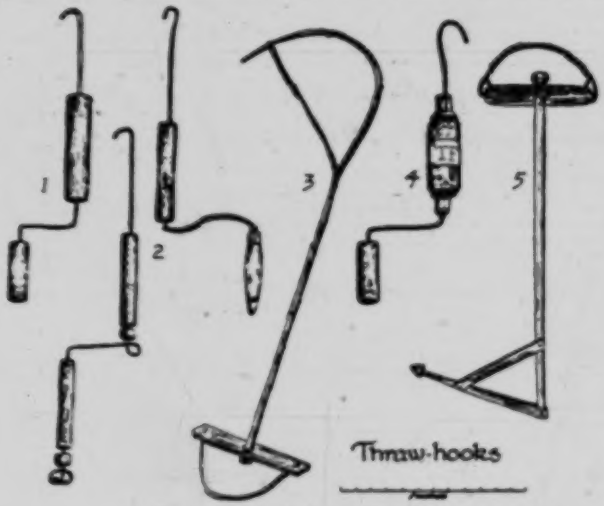

[413]

Fig. 78.

Sugán twisters 1. Co. Antrim. 2. Both Donegal. 3. Lecale, Down. 4. Leitrim. 5. Dingle, Kerry.

in the chimney canopies. It was used for the seats of chairs and for the clothes-line which stretched across the kitchen. A short length was sometimes worn as a girdle around a child's dress. From it were made tethering ropes, spancels and langles, traces and tail-ropes; and on the Donegal seaboard I have heard of cabbages being tethered "against the wind" by three hay-ropes! It is on record that the men of Mayo would descend the seacliffs suspended by a straw-rope.

A length of sugán is also the foundation course of many more complex objects of straw such as mats, mattresses, screens, beehives, nesting boxes, stools, arm-chairs, baskets and hampers. I illustrate (Fig. 79) one of the conical hen-nests which are hung on pegs in the kitchen: large

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[481]

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Fig. 79.

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314 the homestead as preparations are made to visit the bog, which may lie at any distance up to some miles away. I fancy turf-cutting was one of the tasks undertaken in the old days by the young people who took the cattle to the booleys. It used to be a communal task, for instance in Donegal until lately [476] six or eight men with their women and child helpers would pool their labour, receiving their meals for the day from the owner of each successive bank to be cut. Similarly each man would take his burden-creel to assist in the communal gathering and stacking in July or August.

Fig. 83. The flachter in use, Coolnagoppoge, Co. Antrim.

Fig. 84. Flachter in "at rest" position.

The first process in turf-cutting is the removal of the surface "parings"—the scraw—consisting of tough matted roots, coarse grass and moss, to a depth of anything from three or four inches to as much as 18 inches. The scraw is not taken as fuel except in areas where turf is scarce, but in some localities where the bogs have all been cut out, as in Rathlin and Tory, thin scraw scraped off the rock is the only fuel, and a very dirty and inefficient fire it makes. A broad spade is employed for paring, supplemented by some sharp cutting tool such as a hay-knife (Fig. 82), or an old scythe blade hafted and fitted with a foot-spur, for notching the vertical

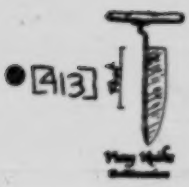

Fig. 82.

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cuts. It is customary to replace the sod on the floor of the bog as the face is cut back, so that the rough grazing is preserved. If the sub-soil is suitable, lowland bogs are reclaimed and good cropping land secured for hay and potatoes. In Armagh strawberries, raspberries, currants and rhubarb grow excellently on the peaty soils.

In the mountain bogs of the north-east a variety of push plough known as the flachter—a word derived from the same root as "flay"—cuts off a scraw some six inches thick as it is driven by vigorous thrusts of the thighs against the stout cross-bar (Figs. 83, 84). Unlike the English breast-

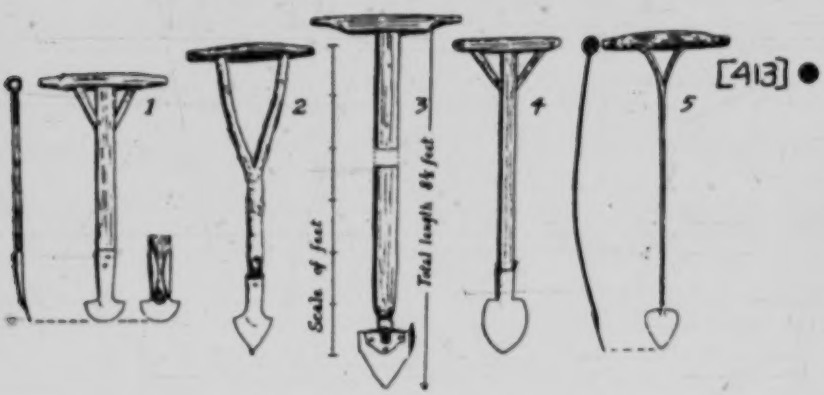

Fig. 85. Flachters.

1. Coolnagoppoge, Co. Antrim.
2. Glendun, Co. Antrim.
3. Glenravel, Co. Antrim (English type).
4. Co. Tyrone (1802).
5. Tirmeel, Co. Derry (iron shaft).

plough, the blade has no side wing. It is fastened to the shaft by the old-fashioned device of folded flanges which we have already come across in the sock of the wooden plough and in the loy. I illustrate in Fig. 85 some varieties of flachter and, for comparison, a breast-plough of English type from mid-Antrim (centre). In connexion with the short-

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314 handled variety the story is told that on old turf-cutter at Coolnagoppoge, on seeing his first aeroplane pass overhead, reported that he had seen "the devil riding a flachter!"

314 413 The prepared turf bank may now be cut in one of two ways, either by "breasting" or by digging "underfoot." Different types of spade or "slane" are required according to which method is adopted, and within these two groups of slanes there is a multitude of regional styles and shapes. In breast-work the digger stands facing the turf bank, and thrusts in his spade horizontally, whereas in underfooting he stands on the bank and cuts vertically. Many factors enter into the distribution of these two digging-modes: the nature and grain of the peat, the depth of the face, and the local tradition. I have seen both methods used side by side on the same mountain, but I have also met foot-slanesmen who had never seen a breast-slane and vice-versa. In the thin mountain bogs the underfoot method is customary, while breasting is favoured in the deep lowland mosses. The turf slane is clearly a specialized version of the narrow loy, with the addition of a side wing to cut out the turf at one stroke. The old styles take the handle in bent-over flanges like the loy, but the new fashions of "factory" spade have borrowed the straps of the "English" digging spade (Fig. 86). Slanes were formerly made by the country smith, and the spade-factories which now forge them must cater for the demands and tastes of innumerable provinces of local culture which correspond, if one may hazard a guess, with old territorial units such as the baronies.

Fig. 86.

One factor in the varying shapes is the angle made by the cutting edge of the wing with the mouth of the blade: it may be at right-angles but is more likely to be set backward or forward at an angle which may be as much as 23°. In the breast-slane it tends to be set back (Fig. 89), while in the foot-slane it may be set forward at a sharp angle (Fig. 86). The edge of the wing measures anything from 4½ to 7 inches: the mouth of the spade averages 4½ inches but I have seen them up to 6 inches. Details vary so much, in fact, that to generalize is dangerous. The top or back of the wing is treated

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in many different ways, for instance around Ballymoney it is hooked and the slanesman uses it to pull the turf-barrow into position. A foot-rest is provided on the foot-slane, on the side opposite the wing. There are left and right-footed workers, but it is not always necessary to use the foot, the strength of the arm sufficing. As with some of the loys (Chapter 13), there is a type of slane in the Midlands which has a separate spade-tree to which the handle is attached by two iron bands (Fig. 88). The spade-tree is of light wood, elm, or larch. Lightness is an essential quality in the slane: the blade is thin and sharp and weighs about 1¼ pounds. The old type of

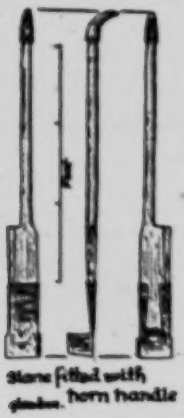

Fig. 87.

slane, like the loy, is straight handled, but it is customary to affix a cow's horn as hand-grip (Fig. 87.) Another type of handle is shown in Fig. 86.

Where the bogs are soft, especially in the area from Galway to Meath, a broad flat breast spade is employed in place of the winged slane. Its blade measures some 13 inches by 5 and it is sharpened at the sides as well as the mouth (Fig. 88). A Co. Derry variety has the edge expanded to 5½ inches: its blade is slightly dished and has a gentle rounded lift. Details of this kind assist in the penetration and with-

Fig. 88.

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drawal of the blade, and the expanded socket acts in the same way. An interesting method of halting is found in the "diamond" breast spade of East Galway (Fig. 88) in which the handle is fitted by soaking it to expand and grip the diamond-shaped perforations in the socket. The flat breast spade has to make two separate cuts before a turf is detached from the face. It has a short handle the length of which, about 2 ft., is adjusted to the length of the user's arm.

An experienced slanesman works with astonishing precision which recalls the steady ticking of a clock, his

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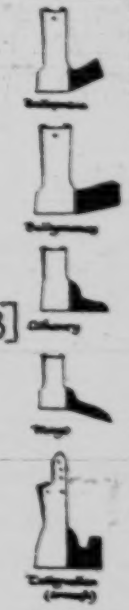
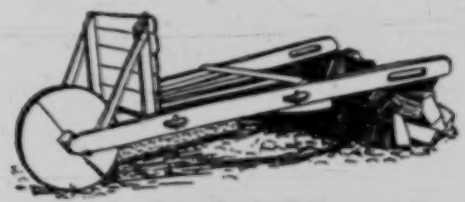
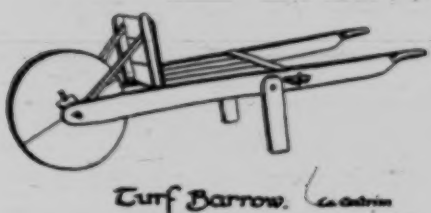


Fig. 89.
Top two are breast slanes.



Turf Barrow.



Turf Barrow.

Fig. 90.

strong thrusts alternating with little jabs, designed to clean the edge of the spade, which remind the onlooker of the rhythmic anvil-tapping of the smith's hammer between his blows. Similarly the co-operation between slanesman, pitcher and spreader, or "holer," is a delightful thing to watch. But the work is hard and relentless. The severed turves may be placed directly on the barrow from the spade, or lifted off by hand two at a time and either loaded or pitched to a third hand who places them on the barrow. On deep

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cuttings a long-handled graip is sometimes used, and the smiths turned out special two-pronged pitching forks for the purpose (Fig. 66). If the peat is soft a long-handled shovel is employed instead. A barrow-load varies in capacity, for instance it is 10 turves in parts of Antrim and 14 in Armagh. The difference depends on the dimensions of the turves as well as the size of the barrow and the state of the bog surface: turves range from about 22 inches by 4 by 5 to 10 inches by 4 by 3, but they shrink considerably as they dry. 314 413 [493]

The turf barrow is a low solid-wheeled archaic-looking vehicle (Fig. 90) the details of its construction showing as many adaptations to local conditions and traditions as the slane itself. It is a compromise between two opposing needs—a large wheel for ease of pushing over the rough bog surface and a low chassis to facilitate loading and emptying, for the barrow is merely tilted on one side by the spreader, the turves slipping off and standing on end in serried rows to dry. The barrow must be as light as possible: hence no iron is used in its construction except for the axle-ends, and, perhaps, a light tyre for the solid wheel or "trundle." In soft bogs the trundle must be wide—as much as 5 inches—but three inches is more usual. Its diameter ranges from 12 to 18 inches. The legs of the barrow are always short and may be mere lugs, or they may be absent, in which case there must be some arrangement for enabling the handles to be gripped: they are either perforated or upturned (Fig. 90). An interesting variant which I have noticed around Athenry has the legs bent backwards in a curve to act as slides or runners. A curious adaptation to soft bogland is recorded a century ago from Co. Mayo, where both horses and men were "shod with boards" when working in the moss. Box-barrows are something used to transport dried turf, or a "kish" may be placed on the flat barrow. In Armagh "carrying baskets" are employed (Fig. 91). 314 493 [492] [481]

Little can be said here about the methods adopted to dry the turf: the shapes and names of the various piles into which 314

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3/4 the fuel is built differ from one area to another, and I give as a sample the list prepared by Mr. J. M. Mogey for Co. Antrim. After about a fortnight the spread turf is stacked in small "foots" formed by leaning a number of turves together, and later in "turn-foots" and "castles" which are built up in storeys. These are then combined into larger "rickles" or

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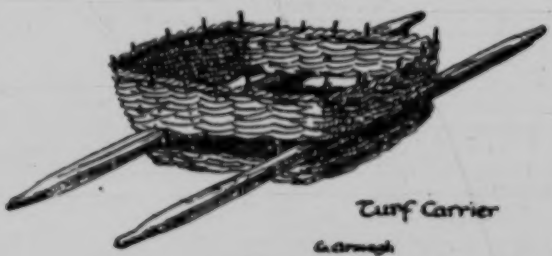

Fig. 91.

"clamps" and finally stored in "hand-stacks" erected alongside a bog road or in larger stacks built at the homestead (Fig. 93).

[413]

Fig. 92.

In many parts of the country the low-lying bogs are too wet to cut with the spade, and other methods of "winning" the turf must be adopted. Making "hand-turf" by moulding or "kneading" the black mud into balls is the simplest solution of the problem, but systematic methods have been evolved in some districts, and we give an account of the process as observed in Co. Meath, where mud turf is highly prized and considered to burn better and last longer than cut peat. It is dug in pits, broken down with short-handled shovels and graips and well mixed with water until the slushy mixture is ready to shovel into a box barrow, that is an ordinary manure barrow or a turf barrow fitted with sides, It is wheeled on to a smooth place and spread in a layer some 9 inches thick. When dry enough to take a man's weight the layer is notched in deep parallel grooves made with the edges of the hands, with cross grooves at intervals. The worker

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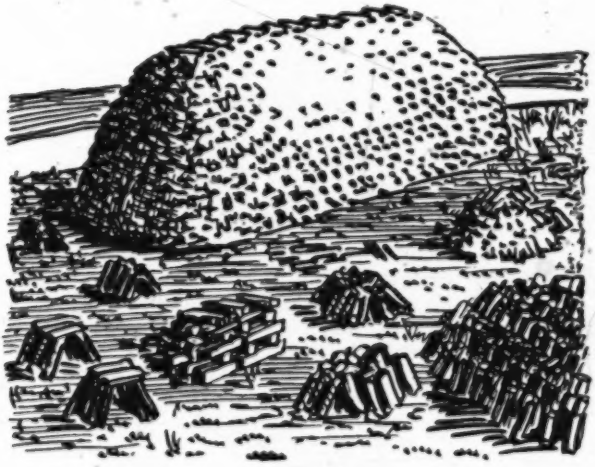
walks backwards, bare-footed, during this process of 314
" running," dipping his hands from time to time in a bucket of water to clean them. The great slab of notched turf then resembles a huge tray of treacle toffee. The brick-like slabs, some 12 inches by 4, are later cut out with a sharp flat turf spade or a hay-knife, and go through the usual processes of footing, clamping and stacking.



Turf stack, footings, castles, spread turf, etc. Co. Antrim.

Fig. 93.

We must now consider briefly the uses made of bog 313
timber, chiefly " fir " (Scots pine), oak and birch. The great [413]
fir stumps are cleaved with a heavy fir-hatchet, from 5 to as much as 14 pounds in weight (Fig. 92). A " lifter " of rather unusual type is also illustrated. The resinous wood makes excellent firing and kindling, but the toughest stumps defy the axe and their twisted roots make a convenient substitute for a gate or a stop-gap. Straight-grained fir was much in demand for making " splits," that is thin strips used for lighting purposes and for making the rims and bottoms of sieves.

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cut with toothed sickles in spring: as in parts of Connacht great rafts of cut seaweed, bound with a rope or with a sugán of wrack, are floated ashore on the flood tide. Seaweed is highly valued as a manure for potatoes on the sandy soils of low-lying coasts—"the potatoes are well-salted before they are gathered"—and it is said to swell the tubers so that they can be readily peeled by machinery. Since in addition the watery potatoes absorb little fat in frying, they are in great demand by the fish-and-chip shops: the export from south Down, for instance, goes largely to the mining districts of south Wales.

Fig. 102.

Fig. 103.
Scale as for Fig. 102.

Some seaweeds are boiled and fed to cattle, other varieties are considered good for pigs, while several kinds are gathered for human consumption:—the strong-tasting dulse, dried and sold in sea-side shops and fairs, purple laver (sloke) and carrageen. I have no evidence for Ireland, but Pennant states that the goatherds of nearby Jura used to make cheese without salt, "lapped in tang and salted with the ashes of sea tang."

Shell-fish of many species—especially winkles—are gathered for home use and are exported in large quantities to England. Young and old may be seen gleaning among the stones at spring tides, and I have known large families who are almost wholly dependent on this ancient strand-collecting life. The larger shells such as mussels and scallops had a variety of uses in the home. Crabs and lobsters caught in rock-holes might be included here, but the "lobster-pot" gets most of this harvest of the sea. Several types of pot are in use. In the north the round-topped netted frame has gained ground generally, but the stronger wicker pots (Fig. 104) are retained for crabs and for trapping bait. In the west the old styles hold their own while a cylindrical variety, probably of French origin, is found on the south coast. Mr. Brian O'Kelly informs me that the lobster-fishermen of west Cork prefer the round wicker pot, but that the netted frame is used in the south-east in addition to the cylindrical variety. The netted frame differs from the type found in the north in that the entrance is on top or at one end instead of at the side.

Fig. 104.
Upper, Antrim.
Lower, Kerry.

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Norway and other sub-arctic regions—and from an economy where straw was not available. We have already noticed that cattle-herders in the early seventeenth century built their booley houses of boughs coated with long strips of green turf. The long sods made a portable roof which could be slung on a pole between two pack-horses.

The sods were cut in strips from carefully selected spots where a close-grazed sward gave a thick mat of grass-roots. They measure two to three feet wide and about one and a half inches thick, and as they were cut they were rolled on to a stick and carried like a carpet. Their roofing sods, wrote Thomas Campbell in 1778, 'they call scraws (they are rolled up like scrolls) but they would be better called hides, for they are flayed off the earth.'[1] In the north, where the flachter or breast-plough was used for paring sods (Chapter X), the scraws might be as much as twelve or fourteen feet long, though short turves were also used. They were carried on to the roof up two ladders and laid on grass upwards, overlapping at the ridge on the side away from the wind. They overlapped laterally also, the scraw on the windward side running over its neighbour on the lee (Fig. 14). In many such details careful attention was paid to the wind and the rain, for example the strongest purlins were put on the side whence driving rain was most to be expected. Similarly the stoutest couples were placed at the weather end of the house, and they were sometimes given a slight inclination towards the wind. A seemingly artless cabin may thus be found to show the most careful adaptation to local conditions.

The first thin layer of thatch was, in some parts of the country, sewn on to the purlins with a thatching needle—the older pattern has a large eye to take hay-rope (Fig. 15)—and the roof might then be finished in one of several regional styles. In the eastern part of Co. Down, and sporadically elsewhere, the straw is laid on in specially prepared bundles or stapples[2] (Gaelic *Stapull*) and the thatch is plastered down at eaves, gable and ridge with clay or mud. A few scollops are added at ridge and eaves. This is probably a very ancient method,

[1] Thomas Campbell, *A Philosophical Survey*, 146.
[2] K. Danaher, *Béaloideas* (1948), 203–17.

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and among the farming population a new roof is hardly ever covered with thatch. The country thatcher finds employment in patching, not thatching.

The erection of such simple houses as I have described did not call for the services of specialists. When the need arose the collective skills of a whole community were available, and one can readily see how prescribed methods were handed down in any particular area. 'The custom on such occasions', wrote Lord George Hill[1]—he is speaking of Donegal in the years before the Great Famine—'is for the person who has the work

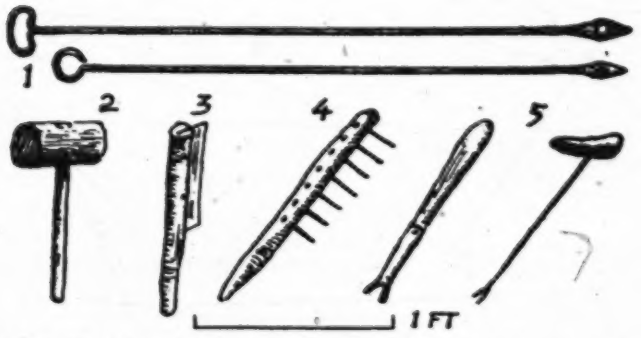

FIG. 15. Thatching tools. (1) Needles, the upper one for hay or fir ropes. (2) Mallet. (3) Trimming knife. (4) Rake. (5) Spurtles for stappling and patching. All from Co. Down except the last, from Co. Meath.

to be done to hire a fiddler, upon which all the neighbours joyously assemble and carry, in an incredibly short time, the stones and timber upon their backs to the site, men, women and children alternately dancing and singing while daylight lasts, when they adjourn to some dwelling where they finish the night, often prolonging the dance to dawn of day'. Like all work done in common, the thatching too was regarded as a sort of festival. In the Aran Islands 'from the moment a roof is taken in hand there is a whirl of laughter and talk till it is ended, and, as the man whose house is being covered is a host instead of an employer, he lays himself out to please the men who work with

[1]Lord George Hill, *Gweedore*, 40.

13:Evans K-5 (ca. 1940) 1957
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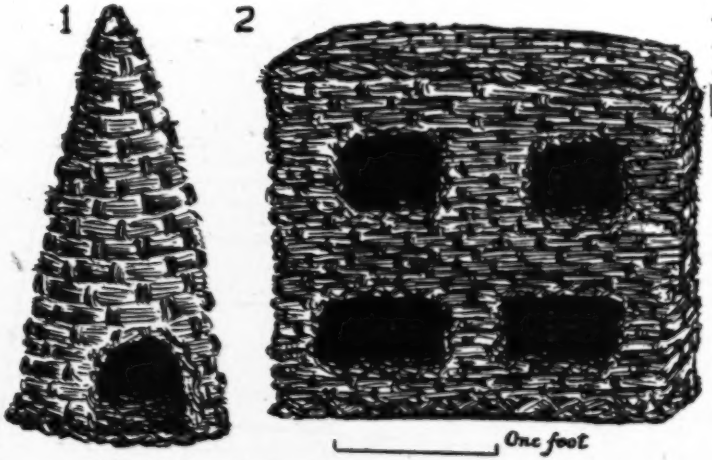

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FIG. 16. Straw hens' nests. (1) Co. Clare. (2) Co. Leitrim.

hen warmly ensconced in a stone-box alongside the fire. In the mud floor one may sometimes see large 'pot-holes', hollows in which the heavy iron pot is placed when the boiled potatoes are pounded for pig-food (Fig. 19). The wooden or iron 'beetles' with which the pounding is done are as varied in shape and size as they are indispensable (Fig. 17). Sometimes

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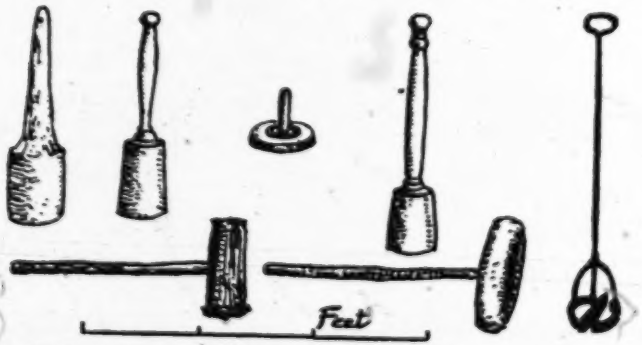

FIG. 17. Beetles, for pounding potatoes and, below, mells for 'knocking whins', Co. Antrim. Beetles similar to the first example were formerly used also for washing clothes and for breaking flax before hand-scutching.

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283 was bound about the waist with a suggan of straw.' The Rev. Philip Skelton was said by his biographer 'in cold weather, to go through Pettigo with a straw rope about him, to keep his large coat on.'[1]

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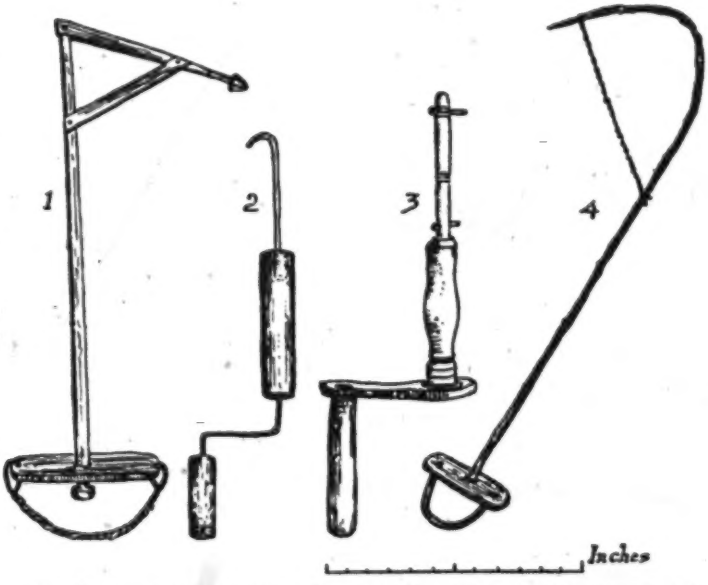

FIG. 67. Rope-twisters. (1) Co. Kerry. (2) Co. Antrim. (3) Co. Armagh. (4) Co. Down. Nos. 1 and 4 are the old-style 'thraw-hooks'.

Short lengths of rope ('thumb-ropes' of hay or straw) are skilfully twisted by hand or, if the material is fine, made by wrapping it round a stick and pulling it out, but a simple tool of ancient lineage, the throw-crook or thraw-hook, is employed when long ropes are needed: it is known also in England and in Scandinavia. A twister of cranked wire resembling a carpenter's brace has, however, largely replaced the wooden hook; it is more tiring but requires less skill (Fig. 67). I have seen a wooden hayrake serving as an improvised thraw-hook. The 283 prepared ropes are wound into golden balls (clews) up to two

[1] S. Burdy, *The Life of Philip Skelton*, 131.

13:Evans K-5 (ca. 1940) 1957
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222 cut at low tide. The weeds were dried on low stone walls and ricked and thatched until ready for the kiln on summer days. Rain rots the weeds, so that in wet weather the heavy kelp had to be shaken and turned repeatedly until it could be safely ricked. The half obliterated ruins of drying-walls and kilns made of sea-boulders can be seen on stormy beaches all around the coast (Fig. 78). In the early decades of the century the

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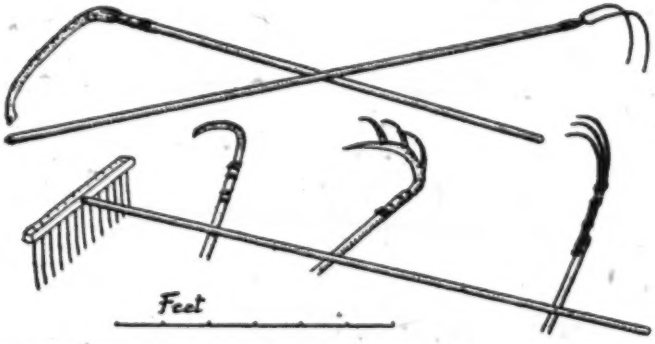

FIG. 78. Kelp harvest. Kelp kiln and stack. Co. Galway. Hooks, knives and drags, west and south coasts (See Pl. 11).

dense oily smoke from the kilns drifting far inland was a familiar sight, each kiln burning for many hours and consuming several tons of weed, which was fed in a little at a time. It is said that 60 tons of weed are required to provide 1 ton of kelp, and the work was both arduous and filthy. If the supply of drift-weed failed the heavy tangles were laboriously dragged ashore or cut with knives mounted on handles up to twenty feet long to reach the best weeds, free of sand, growing in deep water. A

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13:Evans K-5 (ca. 1940) 1957
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combined knife and drag found in Connacht has three heavy hooks attached to a strong sickle-shaped blade mounted on a 12-ft. pole (Fig. 73). Powerful long-handled scythes and great hand-rakes with teeth a foot long were used on the south coast. In Donegal the men would wield their long knives from curraghs while the women dragged the weed ashore.

In the Rosses of west Donegal around 1750 the rents were paid in kelp: any surplus was bartered for 'the two luxuries, spirits and tobacco, enjoyed by men and women alike.'[1] For the lesser weeds growing in shallow water ordinary sickles were employed when the tide was low, but these species made inferior kelp. Yet in some areas, for example Strangford Lough, stones were planted on the shore to grow wrack for kelp burning: Arthur Young commented on this practice in 1776.[2] Old seaweed beds may be seen also in Lough Swilly, Clew Bay, Achill Sound and probably elsewhere.

Today the most remarkable area of cultivated weed is near the mouth of Carlingford Lough in County Down, where at low tide a wide stretch of mud and sand is exposed in Mill Bay. It is grown solely to supply fertilizer for the potato crop. Wrack rights are mentioned in grants of land in County Down as far back as 1506, but the earliest reference I have found to the cultivated weed in Carlingford Lough is in a guidebook of 1846. As we have seen, however, Arthur Young refers to the growing of wrack for kelp-burning in Strangford Lough, and since the best species for kelp grow in deeper water the planting of seaweed beds is not likely to have originated with the kelp industry. Through the second half of last century some 1,100 beds, covering well over a square mile in area, were maintained in Mill Bay, and it was not until the depression between the two world wars that they began to be neglected. Today the use of wrack has almost entirely given way to artificial fertilizers, with a great easement of labour but a loss of annually renewed organic matter in the soil. The wrackbeds, or 'plans', are half-acre rectangles set with rows of boulders a foot or so in diameter, but many beds are subdivided into small 'cuts' for sub-letting, and the Estate Map showing the beds has the

[1] A. B., *The Rosses in 1753*, 201.
[2] A. Young, *Tour*, 1, 194.